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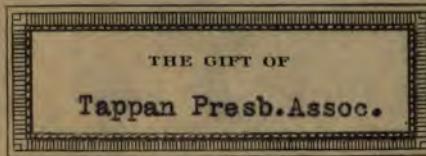
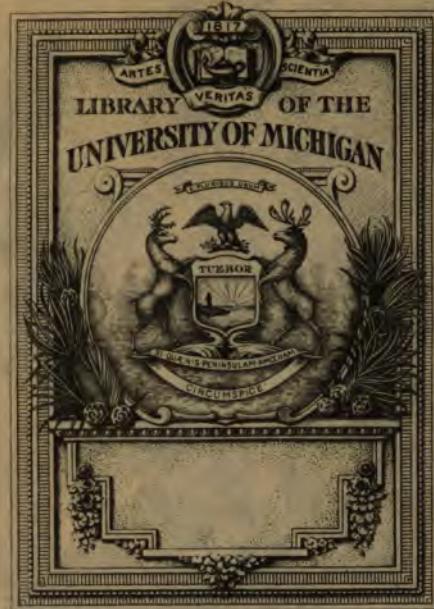
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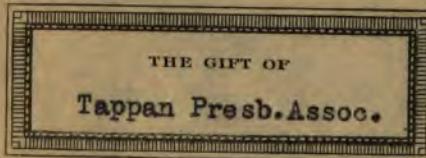
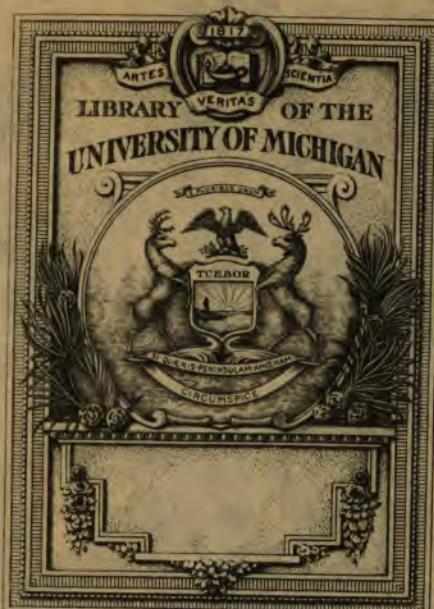
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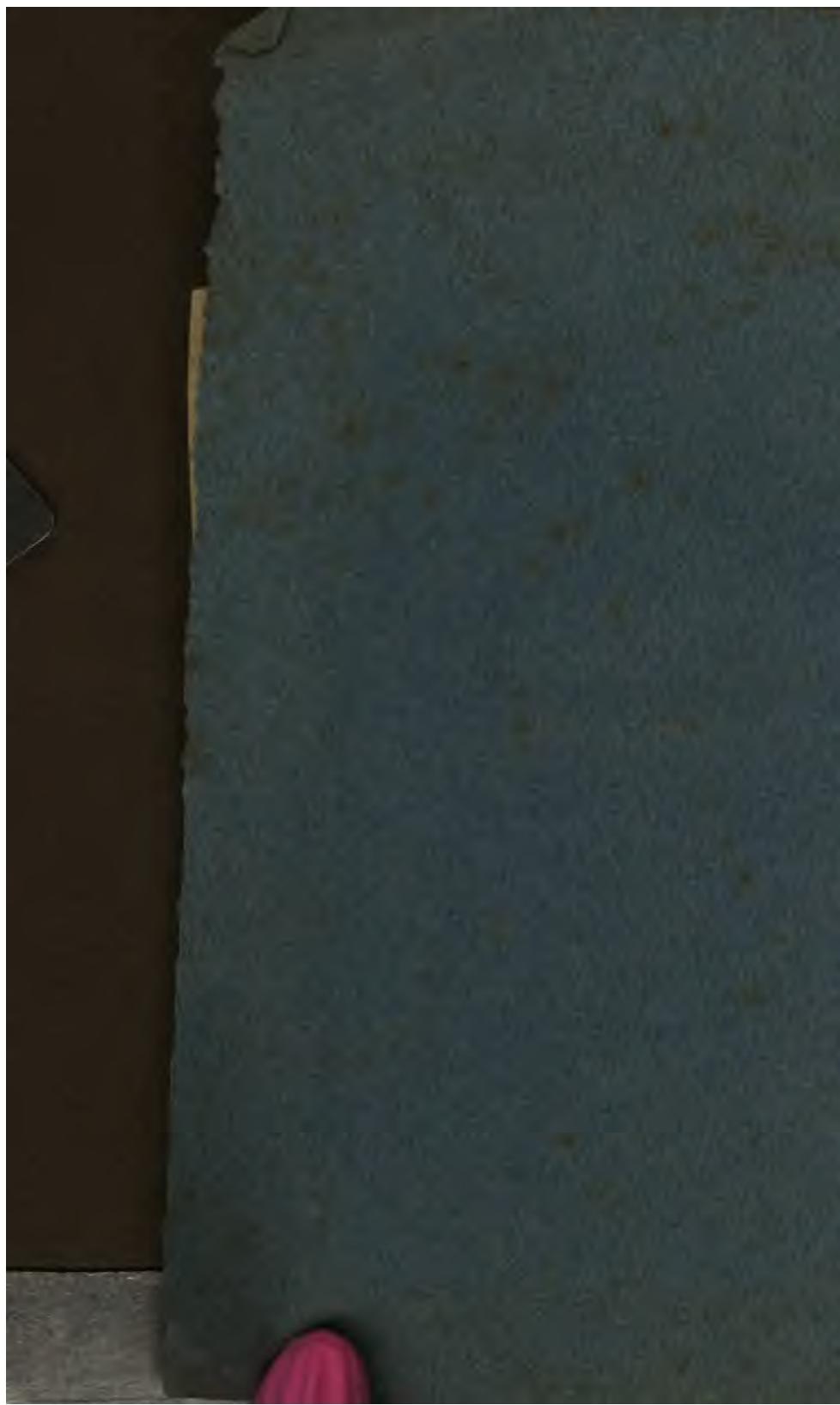
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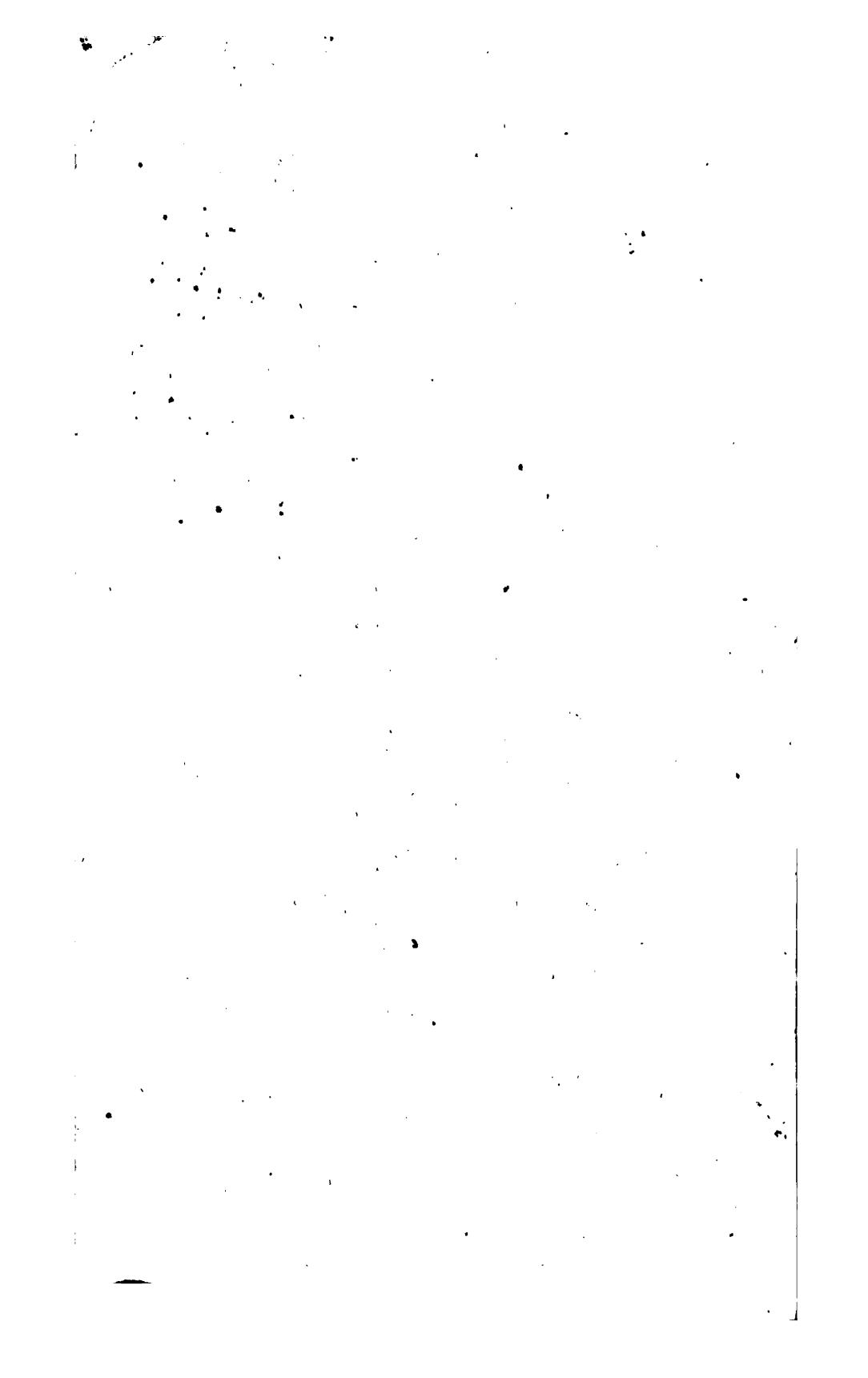


DeWitt M. R.

MINISTERIAL INFLUENCE.



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MINISTERIAL INFLUENCE.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE

SYNOD OF PHILADELPHIA,

IN LANCASTER, PA. OCTOBER 27, 1830.

BY WILLIAM R. DE WITT,

Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, in Harrisburg, Pa.

[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.]

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1830.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The author of the following discourse thinks it due to himself to state, that it is published in consequence of the repeated and earnest solicitations of a number of the members of the Synod before which it was delivered. Had his own feelings, merely, been consulted it would never have been sent to the printer. It was written amid the press of pastoral engagements; and is published under the same circumstances, without time to make those corrections, which, perhaps, a proper regard for the public taste demands. If, however, its publication should contribute, in the least, to raise the standard of piety among ministers of the gospel, the author will not regret yielding to the solicitations of his brethren. Their official relations, the aspect of the times in which we live, and the approaching solemn retributions of Eternity loudly call on ministers to awake from their slumbers, and "put on the whole armour of God."

Gift
Tappan Presb., Assoc.,
9-8-33

S E R M O N.

MATTHEW v. 13.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men.

THESE words were addressed by our Lord to his disciples, and have a peculiar reference to the public and official character which they were designed to sustain as ministers of the gospel. Their influence as invested with this office, if associated with required personal qualifications and discharged with becoming fidelity, is represented as most effective and salutary. "*Ye are the SALT of the earth.*"

The use of this substance in the material kingdom to counteract a tendency to decay and putrefaction, and preserve in a sound and healthful state the objects to which it is applied, is too well known to render any extended explanation of the comparison necessary. It is here assumed by our Saviour as a fact, that there is so strong and so universal a tendency in mankind to increasing depravity, that without some efficient counteracting influence, they would proceed from bad to worse, until all those moral qualities necessary to their social and individual happiness, and even existence, would soon be lost in one mass of moral putrefaction.

This counteracting influence, the Saviour asserts, is prominently found in the office of the gospel ministry when that office is associated with its proper qualifications and discharged with fidelity. A want of these qualifications or a deficiency in them must, therefore, be attended with the most disastrous consequences. "*But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.*" If ministers of the gospel are destitute of those personal qualifications which, by the ordination of God, are necessary to give effect to their ministrations, the office becomes worthless—good for nothing—reprobated by God and contemned by men. And as a general rule, in proportion as these qualifications are possessed by those who assume the office, it will become effective in promoting the good it was designed to promote.

What then are these qualifications? What constitutes the savour which gives this salt its efficacy, and without which it is good for nothing? In other words, what are the elements of that character which is necessary to give efficiency to the duties of this important office?

The great, the primary qualification, my brethren, is ardent personal piety;—a heart deeply imbued with the love of God and the love of man;—a soul that has been made to feel, by the effectual teachings of the Holy Ghost, the evil and the bitterness of sin,—that has been led, humbled and subdued to the feet of Jesus,—that has been taught to look up with affectionate and holy confidence to this Saviour, and from a full and an affecting sense of obligation to consecrate all to his service and to his glory, and that is habitually impressed with, and actuated by, the commanding motives of the gospel. When I say that ardent piety is the great and primary qualification, I do not, however, mean to disparage others. Competent talents, learning, sound theological views, aptness to teach &c. are all important, very important when associated with piety. But they should never be substituted in its place. Their usefulness in the gospel ministry depends on their being

connected with a heart supremely devoted to Christ and his cause.

The subject, then, to the illustration of which I shall call your attention on the present occasion is—

THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF AN ELEVATED STANDARD OF PIETY IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

I presume that no one at all acquainted with the nature and duties of the ministerial office, will for a moment hesitate to admit the necessity of ardent piety in the ambassador of Jesus Christ; and perhaps a variety of particulars will be immediately suggested, in which the importance of this piety is illustrated. But it is not unfrequently the case, my brethren, as you all know, that truths of the greatest practical importance readily obtain the assent of minds on which not the most indistinct trace of their legitimate influence is ever discovered. And though some may think that it ought in courtesy to be admitted, that no one has ever presumed to obtrude himself into this sacred and responsible office, or lives a day without feeling an impressive sense of his obligation to have his own soul deeply imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ, and without making the most unwearied exertion to attain to this,—yet I must be permitted to say, that it is my own serious conviction, that our comparative want of success in the discharge of our ministerial duties arises mainly from the low standard of our personal piety, and our want of devotedness to the cause of our Master. In saying this, let me not be understood as wishing to appear as the accuser of my brethren, but as being involved with them in the same condemnation.

In illustrating the great importance of an elevated standard of piety among ministers of the gospel, I would remark,

IN THE FIRST PLACE; THAT NO MINISTER CAN WITH SAFETY REST SATISFIED WITH HIS OWN RELIGIOUS CHARACTER AND HOPES, WITHOUT A MUCH GREATER MEASURE OF PIETY THAN MAY BE NECESSARY TO SATISFY A PRIVATE CHRISTIAN.

Who, my brethren, that has ever seriously thought upon this subject, has not been painfully sensible, that it is a very

easy thing for a man, under the influence of the restraints of the ministerial office and actuated by merely selfish motives, to pass through life with a reputation unstained, nay, with a character for zeal and engagedness in his work, and yet at last go down to the pit? Such is the tone of public sentiment in this country, (and we ought to be very thankful it is so), that a minister must be strictly moral in order to sustain a decent character in the view of the world, much more, in the view of his brethren in the ministry. He knows that the moment he steps aside from the path of propriety in this respect, his reputation will be lost, his character gone, and his prospects, as far as this world is concerned, tenfold more gloomy & appalling in virtue of the office he sustains. Public opinion, moreover, (at least in most parts of our country), requires that a minister maintain with strictness, the forms of godliness in the performance of all the external duties of piety. A minister who should be known to neglect the worship of God in his family, or in private, would be sure to sustain a very unenviable reputation even among the ungodly. In their view, if there be no discrepancy between his general conduct and his official character, his reputation would rise in proportion to his zeal and industry in his calling. They know what a minister ought to be; and however much they may hate his consistency and zeal, their consciences and their understandings will approve of them, while they will despise the man who sacrifices his duty to secure their favour. In addition to all this, from the moment a man assumes the ministerial office, all the relations he forms, all the duties in which he engages, and the whole course of his life proceed on the assumption that he is a man of piety. His person is invested with a degree of sacredness which secures to him a deference into whatever society he is thrown. He is scarcely ever permitted to forget his high and holy vocation. Under the influence of all these restraints and motives so constantly exerted, it is no difficult thing for a man in the ministry to pass through life, maintaining that form and appearance of piety, and zeal, and engagedness neces-

sary to sustain his professional reputation, and yet be utterly destitute of true religion. In all this he may have no intention to deceive, for he is himself the victim of a delusion, the strength of which is increased by every step he takes in his ministerial life, and from which he may never be freed, until he opens his eyes upon the light of eternity.

Of all conditions under heaven, that of a minister of the gospel without the possession of true piety, is the most deplorable, the most hopeless. Though destitute of religion, he is constantly under the influence of motives to pursue a course of conduct that will sustain his professional reputation; while that reputation thus sustained, will shield his conscience against the approach of the conviction that he is "*without God and without hope in the world.*" No minister ought to be satisfied with slight evidences of his christian character. Unless the vital savour and the power of godliness are experienced and manifested to such an extent as to preclude mistake; unless the love of Christ be evidently the absorbing affection, there is nothing on which the soul can rest with safety. The gospel may be preached, the duties of the ministerial office may be performed, professional reputation may be sustained, and the soul, notwithstanding all, eternally lost.

But, my brethren, our own salvation, the safety of our eternal interests, is of but little consequence in itself, compared with other interests that are materially affected by the standard of our piety. I remark, therefore,—

SECONDLY; THAT IT IS OF VAST IMPORTANCE THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN ELEVATED STANDARD OF PIETY AMONG MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE, FROM THEIR RELATION TO THE CHURCH OF GOD, THEIR STANDARD, NECESSARILY, IN A GREAT MEASURE BECOMES HER'S; AND NOT ONLY SO, BUT THE PECULIAR CHARACTER AND TONE OF THEIR PIETY IS IMPRESSED ON HER MEMBERS.

The aphorism, "like priest like people." though perhaps a perversion of a scripture declaration, is nevertheless

true. It is founded upon principles of common sense, and is proved by observation and experience.

Ministers are placed as ensamples to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. It is their duty to exhibit in their lives the entire spirit of that religion which they preach to others, with the view of affecting their characters, and moulding them in this respect after their own. It is with this understanding on the part of the people that they assume the ministerial office. And where that affection and confidence exist between ministers and people which ought ever to exist, it cannot be otherwise but that the religious character of the one will be in a great measure impressed on the other. Under these circumstances the people will naturally be disposed to regard the example of their minister, as the manifestation of the christian spirit, as far as it can be or is necessary to be attained to, in the present life. However well he may preach; however faithfully he may, in his public teaching, exhibit the distinguishing traits of christian character, and urge the performance of christian duty, his people will first look for the manifestation of these traits of character in him, and mark his conduct as their example for the performance of christian duty. If he falls far below the standard which he exhibits from the pulpit, they will readily suppose, that however desirable it may be to attain to such an elevated standard, yet, owing to the weakness and imperfections of our nature, it is impossible. Their minister does not do it; it is therefore in vain for them to attempt it. The measure of his piety will be the standard to which they will seek to attain, and the manner in which it is developed and manifested by him will be copied by them. Let a minister on the sabbath preach what are usually termed the doctrines of grace; let him exhibit them with clearness and urge them with force, but in his weekly intercourse with the members of his church, instead of making these the theme of his conversation; instead of manifesting the deepest and tenderest solicitude to know whether they are incorporated with their experience,—whether they are the food of their souls,

—whether they have the affections, the desires, the hopes, the joys, which these doctrines, when received by faith, inspire;—instead I say of doing this, let him never, or seldom allude to the subject, or, when he does, let it be merely in a didactic or polemic manner; let him manifest a backwardness, a hesitancy in conversing with them about their own individual experience, while he converses readily, freely and with interest, on every worldly topic, and what will be the effect? Of what kind of Christians will his church be formed? Is it likely that under such ministrations, and in the view of such an example, the doctrines preached on the sabbath will be grafted into the soul, and manifested in all the freshness and beauty of practical godliness? Will there be deep religious feeling in that church; and in the intercourse of its members with each other will one be heard to say to another, "Come, and I will tell you what God has done for my soul?" Will there be that sweet interchange of sentiment that action and reaction of religious feeling so conducive to the growth of piety? Could such a result be reasonably expected, when the minister in his social intercourse with his members never sets the example? No, my brethren, it would be unreasonable to expect it.—Under such ministrations, and in view of such an example, the members of the church would, no doubt, feel that it was important for them to hear a good orthodox discourse on the sabbath day, but here their particular concern with it would terminate, as, so far as they saw and witnessed, it did with their minister. If they should ever think or speak of it afterwards, it would be merely in a didactic or polemic manner; for as to any *experience* of the truth, they never speak of it. *That* they appear to think is a subject which belongs to *another* denomination; *that* is the distinguishing peculiarity of *another* sect.

The same is true in regard to the duties of religion.—A minister may exhibit, from the pulpit, with great clearness the duty of family worship and private devotion, and he may forcibly urge the performance of these duties on the members of his church; but if in his weekly intercourse

with them he does not manifest a deep and tender solicitude that they perform these duties; if he does not make the performance of them a subject of inquiry; if he does not in this way manifest that he regards their performance in their proper spirit an essential evidence of christian character; if he meets with members of his church who, he has reason to believe, neglect these duties, and if he seldom or never introduces the subject, or makes special inquiries with a spirit that shall at once manifest how essentially important he regards their performance, and how deeply grieved he is in finding them neglected, what will be the result? We should not be surprised, my brethren, if, after a number of years, the appalling result should be a *prayerless church.*

And so with regard to any other subject; revivals of religion for instance;—the instrumentality of human agency in the conversion of sinners, and the consequent call for effort, persevering, untiring effort on the part of the church;—the missionary cause, &c.—It is not, my brethren, the mere discussion, from the pulpit, of these subjects, and the enforcement of the duties growing out of them, that is to produce in the members of our churches that deep feeling of responsibility which they ought to possess, and form them for vigorous and efficient action. Our discussion of these subjects will be regarded as professional duty. It is the spirit which we manifest *out of the pulpit*, and which we carry with us, in our daily intercourse with our people, to which they will look for the real importance which they are to attach to these subjects, and as the example after which they are to copy. If here there is not witnessed a deep felt sense of responsibility; if in this intercourse it is not manifest that these subjects take a deep hold on our affections, and that we feel that we live only to promote the cause of Christ, it is not only folly, it is sinful to expect that this should be the case with *them*.

The importance, then, of an elevated standard of piety among ministers of the gospel, from the influence they have in giving character and tone to the church of God, is im-

mense. For, my brethren, it is nothing but a spirit of deep, all-pervading, heart felt piety that will enable a minister to make this impressive exhibition of the spirit of christianity in his daily intercourse with his people. Mere affectation, grimace, pantomime, will not do for the daily and continued intercourse of ministerial life. Our souls must be deeply imbued with the spirit of Christ, and they must be kept so by a close walk with God, and by drinking deep and daily at that fountain of spiritual influence which God has opened for us.

I need not tell you here, my brethren, how immensely important it is that our churches should be composed of members or at least of a majority of them, who should themselves give in their whole conduct an impressive exhibition of the spirit of the gospel to the world around them; that they should be those who not only know but have experienced, the power of divine truth, and who live under its influence;—those, who, while they feel themselves the consolations and hopes of the gospel, feel also their obligations to exert all their influence and make the most vigorous efforts to send it to others. Were this the case; had ministers nothing to do but spend their strength in preaching the gospel to sinners, certain of the co-operation of a church deeply imbued with the spirit of the Bible, how delightful would be our work, and how immensely different its results! But this is not the fact. The want of the vital savor of godliness which obtains in most of our churches; their coldness, their formality and worldly spirit are such, that our Zion is often a by word and reproach to the wicked, instead of being, as it ought to be, "terrible as an army with banners." And where does the fault primarily lie? Ah! my brethren! may not God say as he did once of old—*"O my people, they that lead thee cause thee to err; they destroy the way of thy paths, and ye that are led of them are destroyed."* Bear with me, brethren. If there be any truth in what I have said respecting the influence of ministers in giving, by their daily exhibition of the spirit of Christ in their intercourse with

their people, form and character to the piety of the churches over which they are placed, and if on the character of the piety of their churches such immense results depend,—what minister does not tremble under the weight of responsibility that rests upon him; and reviewing his past life, looking over his church, and forward to the judgment seat before which he must soon appear, does not feel that his only place is in the dust, at the footstool of sovereign mercy. I remark

THIRDLY. THAT AN ELEVATED STANDARD OF PIETY IN THE MINISTRY, IS OF VAST IMPORTANCE IN ORDER TO SECURE SUCCESS IN THE SALVATION OF SOULS.

I am well aware that it will not do always to make the measure of a minister's success the measure of his piety.—Tho' the circumstance may sometimes be used as an opiate to lull the consciences of the slothful and presumptuous to rest, it is nevertheless true, that some of the holiest and most devoted ministers have been left to take up the lamentation, “*who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*” Yet, my brethren, we ought to remember for our own condemnation that it is not God’s usual procedure. His providence as well as word establishes the position that it is in proportion only to our ardent, devoted and enlightened piety, that we have reason to expect the divine blessing on our ministrations in the conversion of souls; for it is in proportion, only to the degree of such piety that that appropriate agency and effort are secured which, by the ordination of God, are connected with this result.

One of the first requisites to successful ministrations is a deep and painful sense of the dreadful guilt and imminent danger of the ungodly, arising out of a spirit of holy benevolence, and of that faith which gives full credence to every thing God has said respecting their condition. We *feel* so little for sinners, because we *believe* so little the scriptural revelation of their danger. Did we fully realize that every impenitent sinner possesses a deathless soul; that he is stained with crime and loaded with guilt; that

the curse of the Almighty rests on his soul, and that he is constantly in danger of sinking into hell, overwhelmed with agony and misery, to be protracted and increased while eternal ages endure, how differently should we feel, and how differently should we act from what we do! Then, indeed, we should have some sympathy with apostles and prophets in their often overwhelming feelings for the souls of their fellow sinners. Then we should know how Jeremiah felt, when he exclaimed, "I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried." Then we should know what the apostle meant, when he so solemnly averred that he had "*great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh;*" and when he speaks of his "*travailing in birth again until Christ be formed in the souls of sinners.*" Then too should we have some sympathy with our blessed Lord himself in that deep feeling for sinners which made him "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,*" and which led him so often to break, in the lonely desert, the silence of the midnight hour, with his strong cries and tears to God his Father in behalf of dying men. Under the influence of this deep feeling, we can readily imagine how we should act in all the duties of our ministerial office. With the vision of eternity before us, in full view of its solemn realities, and under a deep sense of our own impotency, with what agony of soul should we be driven to the Throne of Grace, to plead with God in behalf of wretched, dying men! Feeling that our instrumentality would be in vain, without the interference of his Almighty arm, we should give him no rest until the windows of heaven were opened, and the Spirit poured out from on high. Then there would be that importunate prayer which has power with God and prevails. Under such an influence our message to the impenitent could not fail of being impressive. We should go and tell them that they were sinners as though we *felt it.* We

should tell them that the curse of the Almighty was upon them as though we *believed* it. We should spread out before them their danger as though we *saw* it; and as we announced these heavy tidings, we should "sigh with the breaking of our loins, and with bitterness should we sigh before their eyes." With what fulness of feeling, too, should we exhibit the Saviour to them as the *only* refuge from the eternal storm of the Almighty's indignation; and with what tearful earnestness should we place before them every motive to escape the wrath to come! Under the influence of such feelings, how could we think of exhibiting our eloquence or our wit before our hearers for their admiration; or of amusing them with speculations in philosophy, when we should reflect, that for aught we knew, before another day should close, or before another sun should rise, their souls would be in hell, shut out from hope, tossed upon the fiery billows of the burning lake, and sending forth the despairing cry, "*the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*"

Moreover, with this deep and painful sense of the danger of the ungodly; with this "great heaviness and continual sorrow" on their behalf oppressing our hearts, could we be contented with the bare weekly exhibition of the truth from the pulpit before the few who would there attend on our ministry? Could we feel that we had thus done our Master's work, and performed our duty to the souls of our fellow men, and that we were at liberty to spend the remainder of our time in our studies, indulging our tastes for intellectual pursuits; or with our families and friends, indulging in the pleasures of domestic and social life; or in our schools, laying up for ourselves treasures on earth, under the plea of providing for our own? Ah no, my brethren! We should be compelled to go into the highways and hedges, into the lanes and alleys, and from house to house, warning sinners of their danger, and urging them to flee from the wrath to come. All the powers of our souls would be called into requisition to invent methods of bringing the truths of God's word to bear on the minds of

sinners. All the honors, the riches, and pleasures of this world would fade into utter insignificance in comparison with the importance of saving one soul from death. To effect this, no self-denial, no labor would be deemed too great. And when we had done all, under a deep sense of our own impotence we should again and again go to God, and earnestly and with importunity implore his blessing.

Such, my brethren, is that appropriate instrumentality which, by the appointment of God, is connected with the conversion of sinners, and which can be secured to its full extent only by an elevated standard of piety among ministers of the gospel. How much then, do we need it!

I sometimes think I can faintly discern what a minister of the gospel ought to be,—what the apostles were,—but oh! it is so high, so far removed from any thing I know, that the very thought of it is painfully oppressive. And yet, there can be no question but that we are under every obligation to have the same spirit which they had, and that, before the church can be introduced into her millennial glory, there must be a return to it, in her ministry. But I remark,—

FOURTHLY,—THAT AN ELEVATED STANDARD OF PIETY AMONG MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL OF VAST IMPORTANCE TO SECURE UNITY OF HEART, OF COUNSEL AND EFFORT AMONG THEMSELVES.

If it be obligatory on private members of the church to love one another with a pure heart fervently, how much more on ministers of the gospel! If they are to "keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace," how much more are we! If their being one in affection, one in purpose and one in effort, is to be the standing evidence of the divine mission of their Saviour, the proof of the heavenly origin of his religion, and one of the means of bringing the world to believe on him, how directly opposite an influence to all this must be exerted by division, jealousy and discord among those who are placed as leaders to the consecrated hosts of God!

That these things always originate in a want of the spirit of devoted and humble piety, whatever may be the immediate cause, there can be no question. If the facts and truths of divine revelation were more fully and permanently the objects of our faith.—if they took a deeper and stronger hold on our minds,—if their influence, simply as the truth of God and independent of our speculations, on the character and destiny of our fellow men, were more fully realized, and if our hearts were entirely absorbed in the work of saving souls through the instrumentality of the truth addressed to the consciences of sinners; I say, if this were the case, it may be that ministers would have less time and disposition for philosophical speculations on the truth of God, and we should have fewer of them;—if fewer of these, perhaps we should have far less diversity of sentiment,—if less diversity of sentiment, perhaps fewer divisions and less party zeal; and if less party zeal, perhaps less discord in our ecclesiastical assemblies. We should meet together perhaps, more in the spirit of brethren, who felt that they were united in purpose and effort to advance the kingdom of Christ in this apostate world. Then indeed it might be said of us, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore.”

There are other subjects in reference to which I had designed to illustrate the importance of an elevated standard of piety among ministers of the gospel, but my time will permit me only to allude to these with brevity.

The exigencies in the times in which we live, and the peculiar circumstances under which the church of God is placed in this country, require in her ministers a high degree of enlightened and devoted piety.

With all the blessings of that civil and religious liberty which we so richly enjoy, it cannot, I think, be questioned, but that it brings with it in the mass of the community a tendency to infidelity. Freed from all those restraints

imposed by the unhallowed and unblest alliance of church and state, and the imposing pomp of an ecclesiastical establishment; and the conscience being left, as to all human authority, free as the air we breathe, it would be more than could be reasonably expected from sinful human nature, that man would here pause, and deliberately consider the claims of religion. Without such reflection, he is continually disposed to view the urging of those claims as an attempt to infringe upon his liberty, and when so viewed, his proud spirit is apt to spurn them. The abuses too of christianity, or at least of the christian name, for the purpose of supporting despotism—abuses with which history teems,—strengthen his prejudices. Associating, in his ignorance, the legitimate claims of religion with these abuses, he feels a pride in showing his contempt of its claims, and in lending his influence in putting down, as he thinks, priestcraft, when in truth, he is digging the grave and preparing the funeral rites for his own liberties. The propensity to infidelity induced by these circumstances, is seized hold of with avidity by infidels themselves, and they are now putting forth every effort to secure, if possible, the downfall of christianity. "*The man of sin, and son of perdition,*" also has cast his eye on this country, and at this very time, is laying his plans and prosecuting his efforts in perfect accommodation with this tendency to infidelity. How the church of God,—how the legitimate influence of christianity shall be sustained and extended here, is a question of immense magnitude. It is a question that involves as directly and as deeply the continuance of our liberties, as it does the eternal well-being of our fellow men. Without entering into this subject now, one thing must be apparent to all: Whatever plans are adopted and prosecuted, they must, in order to be successful, be entered into with a spirit of deep, humble and devoted piety. There is a peculiar responsibility now resting on ministers of the gospel to be pre-eminently holy men. Christianity here, cannot have, nor ought it ever to seek, any aid foreign to its pure spirit. It must be sus-

tained on the ground of its own intrinsic excellence. It must shine, especially in its ministers, the brightest in the hour of its trial. It must then be arrayed in all its celestial beauty; and while it thus demonstrates to an unbelieving world its heavenly origin, it must draw down from the throne of God the defence and support of his Almighty arm.

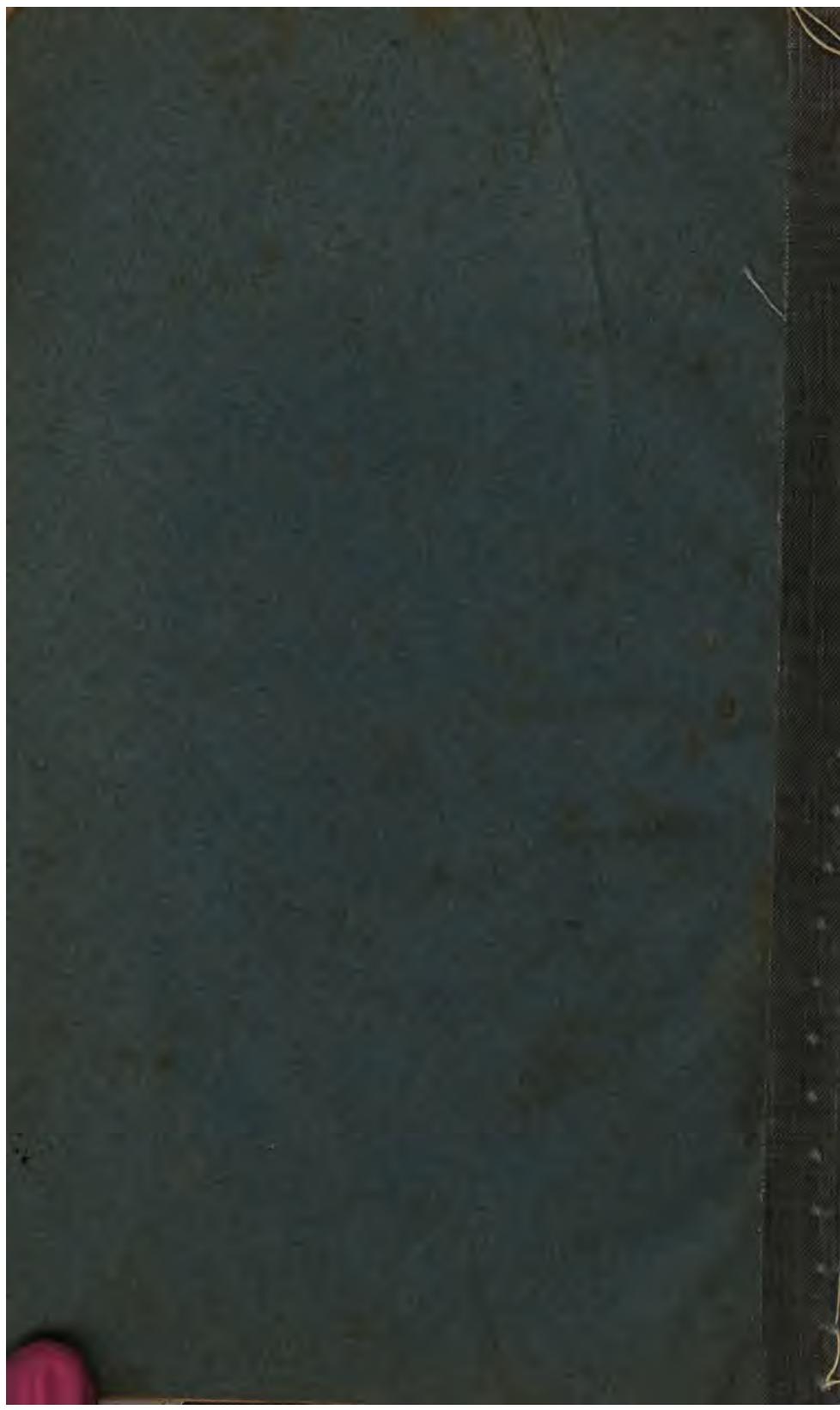
But it may be, my brethren, and wise and good men have supposed that it will be,—that God, in order to purify his church, in order to prepare her as a bride adorned for her husband, to enter into her millennial glory, will suffer her again to pass through the fires of persecution. If so, certainly it will require an elevated standard of piety in her ministers to sustain them. The fires of Smith-field may be rekindled on the green fields of our own beloved country. Torn from the bosoms of our families, and from the embraces of our flocks, we may very soon be called to choose the alternative, either of renouncing our religion and with it the hope of heaven, or of submitting our mortal bodies to the agonies of the flames. To die a martyr's death, is, indeed, an honor surpassing all other honors, but it requires a martyr's spirit,—the purest, holiest, most devoted love to Christ and his cause.

But I must not enlarge.—In whatever light we view the ministerial office,—in whichever of its relations we contemplate it, the vast importance of ardent piety in those who have assumed this office is urged upon our attention; while the solemn conviction that the standard of piety among ministers of the gospel is, compared with what it ought to be, low, very low, produces the most painful and melancholy apprehensions.

Beloved brethren, let us learn from this subject for our own self condemnation, why it is that in our churches we behold so little of the spirit of primitive christianity; why it is that we see so little practical godliness in all its freshness, and vigor, and beauty; why it is that there is such a mournful deficiency not merely of the spirit, but even of many of the forms of religion. We have a great many

members in communion in our churches; but if the enquiry should be made, how many of those who are heads of families stately worship God in their families; how many know their way to their closets in order to bow their knees in secret before the Throne of Grace, what would be the result? I know that these things may be done, and yet the heart be estranged from God; but if the heart be not estranged from him, they will not be neglected. I know too that it may be said, that all these things may be done, and not known, not trumpeted abroad; but can we who have the care of their souls be guiltless in the sight of God if we rest without satisfactory evidence that these things are done, on the plea that they may be performed without our knowledge? But if we go further than this and enquire, how many in our own communion manifest that they are under the influence of deep, permanent religious feeling,—that they walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost,—that they have daily fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, and are “*looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*”—how many, who have “*great heaviness and continual sorrow in their hearts.*” for wretched sinners around them; and who go in the fulness of their feelings, and with tears entreat them to escape from the wrath to come;—how many who are indeed the spiritual seed of wrestling Jacob.—what would be the answer? Ah! are they not in all our churches as “*when they have gathered the summer fruits—as the grape gleanings of the vintage,* when there is scarcely a cluster to eat!

Let us learn from this subject why it is that our ministrations are so barren of fruit;—why it is that the windows of heaven are closed and the Holy Spirit withheld;—why so few sinners are rescued from eternal death. Let us not attribute this result to the mere sovereignty of God, while we fold our arms to sleep. Had we the spirit, the devotedness, the self-denial, and the untiring ardor of the apostles, could we doubt but that we should have, in a far greater measure, at least, their success?



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